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Thoughts about USAID'S Reforms

Perspectives from the Center for Naval Analysis

Tom Barnett
Center for Naval Analysis

Technical Paper No. 96
June 1999

USAID

Agriculture, Natural Resources and Rural Enterprise
Office of Sustainable Development
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U.S. Agency for International Development

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Contents

Foreword

At AFR/SD's request, the Center for Naval Analysis Corporation has been tracking USAID's experience in designing and implementing reengineering and has prepared for AFR/SD a set of informal issues briefs designed to raise concerns and recommend possible actions. While CNA is primarily a DOD contractor, in particular having been one of the prime Navy and Marine Corps strategic planning "think tanks" for over four decades, we were struck with the fresh insights they brought to the USAID reengineering process based on their work in supporting similar reinvention efforts in defense agencies.

As noted in the introduction, the essays and issues presentations were first introduced as a series of submissions to the listserve RFNET. RFNET is an informal, moderated, e-mail discussion group on reengineering and Results Frameworks. It is an informal network; its content is the sole responsibility of the respective authors. Unless otherwise stated, none of the comments represent a formal opinion of USAID. RFNET refers to Result Frameworks, a key element of the new Operations System, and highly compatible with SO5's approach to environmental programming.

Some of the essays have been published in USAID's reengineering newsletter, "On Track," and have been quite favorably received. All of the essays and each of the issues papers as separates are available on the RFNET web site library at http://www.rfnet.org/. This collection consolidates the essays and issues presentations in one document responding to an expressed need to make these opinions and observations conveniently available in one document.

RFNET is an activity in support of Strategic Objective Five (S05) of AFR/SD, "Improved Policies, Strategies and Activities for Accelerated Natural Resource Management in Africa." The Africa Bureau has actively been supporting its missions and partners in making the transition to the new reforms since 1995, including the training of partners, improved communication of new approaches among missions through RFNET, and other activities.

While CNA's other writings for us have used a wide range of analogies, we've asked them this time around to stick to analogies from DOD, in particular the Navy, which has undergone similar changes over the last five years. Are these examples perfect fits to USAID? Not always. But they are stimulating, and many are remarkably on-target, so to speak. As always, they represent solely the views of CNA and not necessarily those of RFNET or the Africa Bureau of USAID.

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Glossary of Acronyms and Abbreviations

CEL	Country Experimentation Lab
CINC	Commander-in-Chief
CNA	Center for Naval Analysis Corporation
COP	Chiefs of Party
IR	Intermediate Results
OPS	Directorate for Operations
PBC	Performance-Based Contracting
PVO	Private Volunteer Organization
R4	Results Review and Resource Request
RF	Results Framework
RFNET	Results Framework Network
RFTechNet	Results Framework Technical Netwprk
ROOR	Results-Oriented Operations Reengineering
RP	Results Package
SO	Strategic Objective
USAID/W	U.S. Agency for International Development/Washington

Thinking about USAID's New OPS System:
Four Essays by an Outsider

INTRODUCTION

This report reprints a number of analytical essays by the author written for the Natural Resources Management (NRM) Unit of the Division of Productive Sector Growth and Environment (PSGE) in the Office of Sustainable Development (SD), Africa Bureau (AFR), United States Agency for International Development (USAID). This work was conducted under a Fixed-Price Purchase Order agreement as part of the extant Environmental Planning and Management Project.

The report constitutes the first deliverable under the Purchase Order identified in the Statement of Work as the "monthly summary of issues related to strategic planning concepts and field experiences, based on USAID mission interchange on reengineering, via RFNET (Results Framework Network)."

These essays were presented to the client in late July and subsequently "published" on RFTechNet (Results Framework Technical Network) in a series of e-mail messages. The series of five messages (the first essay was transmitted in two parts) was preceded by an introductory message jointly drafted by RFNET/RFTechNet "owner" Tony Pryor of USAID and the author. The author, the CNA Corporation[1], and the e-mail series were introduced in some detail in this message, which was sent out on both RFNET and RFTechNet. Later, after the essay series had been transmitted on RFTechNet, a summary of the texts was provided for RFNET subscribers.

The four essays are reprinted here essentially as they appeared on RFTechNet (with minor editing). In most instances, RFNET/ RFTechNet owner Tony Pryor provided additional commentary to the pieces, in the form of either a foreword or an afterward. These commentaries are available from Mr. Pryor through the RFTechNet archives.

The essays appear here in the order they were submitted to USAID:

- "The Cross-Country Road Trip Analogy," which compares the Results Framework (RF) planning process with planning for a cross country trip from Washington, D.C., to Los Angeles, California
- "Best Practices and the Joy of Failure," which compares the RF planning process with military planning and examines the process of generating "best practices" from the perspective of failure rather than that of success
- "The San Francisco 49ers Analogy," which compares the RF planning process with the learn-as-you-go methodology employed by Bill Walsh when he was head coach of the San Francisco 49ers team in the National Football League in the 1980s
- "The Football Coaches Analogy," which compares the RF planning process with how an American football coaching staff prepares the various position players for their next game by developing measures of effectiveness that reflect the team's overall success rather than the success of any one player.

[1] The Center for Naval Analysis (CNA) is a not-for-profit organization providing research, analysis, and technical services to the government and other organizations. CNA is a federally funded research and development center sponsored by the Department of the Navy. For more than 50 years, CNA has conducted research and analysis that have helped the Navy and Marine Corps become more effective and efficient. CNA conducts analyses for other Department of Defense and non-Defense clients whose needs fall within CNA's mission.

Essay 1

The Cross-Country Road Trip Analogy

First, let me offer the analogy regarding the concept of "best practices," and also a sense of how I tend to view Results Frameworks (RFs) in general.

RFs are like road maps that take the Mission from Point A (current situation for host nation) to Point B (hoped-for strategic objective, or SO). Obviously, there is no single "carved in stone" route from A to B, and the RF represents, at the startup of the effort, your best collective guesses on the most feasible and fruitful route (or, better yet, routes) for individual Results Packages (RPs), i.e., like the "tracks" logic offered by the Madagascar mission. Naturally, you consult your road map every year and recalibrate your sense of progress, i.e., how far along the road you've traveled, what you've learned in the process, your new best guesses on the obstacles ahead, and a refigured compass reading on the correct direction to pursue toward the SO. Thus, the RF is a living document that changes with time and the progress of the journey.

In fact, the only way the RF would not change would be if you make no headway at all, which we hope would lead to its immediate termination. Otherwise, we could argue that the burden of proof in the R4 process (Results Review and Resource Request) should be up to the missions to prove – year in and year out – as to why they shouldn't have to alter their RFs, although the SO probably remains the same, instead of why these plans should remain the same. On this point, my own USAID/Washington Grand Inquisitor question for an R4 meeting would be: "Do you mean to tell me that an entire year has passed and you've learned nothing that makes you want to alter the structure of your RF? How can that possibly be? Surely your customers don't view the process today exactly as they did a year ago!"

Five to eight years from now – assuming you get to that promised land of Point B (or the SO) – you, the mission, and the rest of USAID will look back over the itinerary, or historical record of the efforts you made across the length of this RF, and then – but only then – will you know a lot more (obviously) about which routes or causal paths made the most sense in trying to get from A to B. (Understanding that the route you took doesn't itself, per se, constitute a best practice, although it might if it reflects some essential truths also borne out in the experiences of other missions.)

Therefore, thinking along these lines, imagine the following analogy:

While in Washington, D. C. (Point A), you initiate a project involving a cross-country trip to Los Angeles (Point B, or the SO). It will take five to eight days (read years). But, then again, who knows? Your convoy of vehicles (imagine the Intermediate Results, or IRs, with attendant Results Packages) may break down along the way (parts of your engine, or hypotheses, don't work or come together as you had hoped). Or you may run into some horrible weather (unforeseen exogenous events such as famines, droughts, civil wars, and currency fluctuations). Fuel (your funding) is always a constricting factor, and the construction you encounter along the way (all those partners with whom you have to work), although designed ultimately to facilitate your journey, often serves to make it more difficult (at the very least, despite everyone's best intentions, you must slow down in these construction zones because, as we all know, partnership and cooperation take time).

So here you sit in Washington, trying to figure out your likely itinerary (the RF). You consider all the possible alternatives by studying the road system (the collective body of development knowledge on getting from A to B), and the first thing that hits you is the fact that there is no one single path.

You start arguing among yourselves. Some want to maximize mileage (to get to the SO as quickly and cheaply as possible by staying on the big roads of the interstate system, i.e., those well-worn routes of conventional wisdom that purport to be the fastest way). Others, however, want to stop frequently along the

way to gauge their progress (soaking up local atmosphere along the way, i.e., spending more on Monitoring and Evaluation and focusing more explicitly on learning). Neither way is inherently correct, but driving strategies serve useful purposes. It depends on how you think your trip should go.

It's not as if you can plot the whole trip from your perch in Washington. Or can you? Well, the planned itinerary itself (the RF) certainly represents a rough sense of the route your vehicles may take (understanding that each one may travel a different path, some going slower, some faster, but all reaching the SO at roughly the same critical-mass-inducing point). The farther west you plan in terms of travel time, however, the less certain your plans become.

The reality is that you'll rethink your daily travel plan each morning before you head out, and that's perfectly natural and allowed under the new operations (OPS) system. After all, your bosses don't care which routes your vehicles take, they only want to see westward progress and a final destination of that agreed-to Strategic Objective (here, Los Angeles).

Now, if somewhere along the way San Francisco seems to make more sense, then you'll need to check back in with the home office in Washington, but short of that, you're largely on your own, except for the requirement to occasionally prove that you're moving in the right general direction (the first R2 of the R4 process), and that you still have fuel (the funding, or the second R2 of the R4 process).

Thus, before heading out on your journey, you make all the logical preparations. You get your vehicles tuned up as well as possible (thinking through the individual RPs as much as possible). You do your homework on road conditions (consulting with your construction partners in advance to plot out where "go slow" zones are necessary and unavoidable). You set up your radio to monitor various elements of importance, such as the weather and rush-hour traffic around major cities (monitoring systems). You make sure that all your dashboard indicators (implementation indicators) are working. Maybe you even use a Citizens' Band radio to converse in real time with fellow travelers who are trying to make similar journeys (for example, keeping in touch with the USAID reengineering newsletter *On Track*, or RFNET/RFTechNet). And, of course, you don't start out without first consulting those gurus of best practices – the American Automobile Association, or AAA (i.e., the Subject Matter Experts, the Center for Development Information and Evaluation, and others).

Perhaps you're thinking, it's a whole new OPS system here, and all that old AAA wisdom is useless now. But that would clearly be going too far. Sure, you need to be more sensitive to your surroundings now, but the vehicles of forward motion (your RPs) are still roughly the same for the most part (still with four rubber wheels and four doors; in other words, still about organizing some USAID work and getting the job done over a delineated time frame).

Plus, these RP vehicles still have to travel over the same rough roads (usual pitfalls of host nations are still the same despite your new vehicle). They still must get from Points A to B. (If you're lost and Headquarters calls you on it, you can't come back with "Yeah, but we're making great time!") You still need funding, and funding takes proof (Headquarters understands you road warriors need your freedom of action, but you're still expected to phone home now and then from a programmatic rest stop). And remember, it's not as if you hadn't developed quite a track record over the years; it's only that these experiences need to be used judiciously and effectively.

On the other hand, this AAA certainly can't rush to judgment regarding "best practices" documents. (The equivalent here might be those wonderful "triptics" that lay out the best-practiced routes in a series of sequential presentations, e.g., the best way around St. Louis is like this, the best way to tell you're not in Kansas anymore is this. Clearly the whole USAID system is in a serious learning curve, self-inflicted, but scary nonetheless. (Actually, self-inflicted learning is always more scary.)

These new vehicles may have to explore entirely new routes, ones about which little is known; or they may have to use the same old routes, but with far different driving strategies. Plus, with the startup of this new class of sensitive-to-local-conditions vehicles

(the RPs), you have to remember that the data pool is really nonexistent at the start and can only grow slowly with time.

Thus, the typical, historically based AAA evaluation material is only partially useful on this particular cross-country jaunt because, again, you're trying it for the first time in a new type of vehicle. In many ways, though, you really need to work more closely with this AAA than ever before, so that the lessons learned—or best practices—are incorporated into the system as quickly and as accurately as possible. But remember that the "first one to LA" isn't necessarily the best practice.

The reality is that only time and experience will tell. Best practices must be allowed to accumulate slowly and surely over the years because, although you're still doing that classic cross-country trek from Point A to Point B, you're driving a differently powered fleet of programmatic vehicles.

Naturally, some in USAID may continue to assume that all this reengineering is nothing more than a process of giving everything new names. This approach insinuates that adapting to USAID's new OPS system is no harder than using the old Soviet-era maps in Russia today, where authorities have changed the names of most of the roads and even many of the towns, yet the maps still work – sort of.

Such an attitude misses the nature of the change. USAID hasn't simply renamed all the destinations. It has sought to redefine the nature of the joumey itself.

Essay 2

Best Practices and the Joy of Failure

This time I want to briefly touch on the concept of learning over the lifetime of the Results Framework, otherwise known to some as the compiling of best practices.

I know that many parts of USAID are scrambling hard to put together document after document outlining best practices for the new OPS system but, to my mind (as reasonably informed and uninformed as this observant outsider can be), it is a misuse of the term to be declaring anything a best practice this early in the game. Missions, even the CELs (Country Experimentation Labs) themselves, are just barely starting to act upon those few RFs already approved and "on the books," so to speak.

And given the hoped-for approach of treating these planning instruments as living documents, subject to adaptive planning as development opportunities arise in the field, any RF already on the books is also subject to a lifetime of change. In short, almost anything cited as a best practice at this point is a shot in the dark. You can say that this or that technique helped you do this or that task in the new OPS system (e.g., constructing an RF), but who's to say, ultimately, whether such an approach was either good or bad? Only time will tell if any one mission, with any one RF, peopled by any such collection of personnel, RPs, partners, and others can be viewed as a complete success.

Once some RF lifetimes start accumulating, we will have some actuarial data to work with. We can start asking why this RF lived out a fuller and better life (not necessarily longer or shorter), and why that one did not. Until then, we are all like so many talking heads on TV, going on and on about what the New Hampshire primary means right after the first 12 votes are cast in some northern hamlet just after midnight. These are good guesses, but think about how it will look in print a year from now.

Of course, keeping to a patient, logical approach isn't easy when you're on the front lines doing battle. You're looking for any clues possible to get the job done, and so you quickly turn to logical sources: information put out by the USAID reengineering gurus; lessons learned from similar organizations that do similar types of long-range planning; first-cut analyses from the front lines of the CELS; and inputs from technique experts who teach rapid appraisals and similar techniques. But remember that none of these sources can yet cite enough data concerning the new OPS system to vault any of their advice to the lofty status of best practices.

That type of knowledge is at least five to eight years away, when the first RFs mature. It's rather like some complex plant you grow in your garden; you're never really sure you're doing it right until you finally harvest that first vegetable and taste it. Saying that is not to discount any of the sources listed above; they are all important. It is only a matter of considering them for what they are.

Here it might be useful to consider some military analogies to the sources cited above. For example, the data from the reengineering gurus is like military doctrine being written for wars not yet fought. It is a tough art, but when paradigm shifts are as profound as those caused by the end of the Cold War, you have little choice. You can only do your best and treat everything – even the rules you write down – as living documents.

As for the first experiences from the CELS, they are equivalent to battlefield intelligence – incredibly important. The timeliness of this information is essential. It can do much good, but it can also be misleading in the longer term. In every war since the 1920s air power has appeared to be extremely powerful and definitively decisive – from the perspective of the battlefield during the war. And yet, every postwar bomb-damage assessment has clearly discredited that impression. (Desert Storm was the last example.)

The real lessons of these wars couldn't be calculated and assimilated with any accuracy until those

hugely complex, terrifically dynamic, and multivariable events reached some closure. Will the CELs possibly turn out to be hugely important sources of best practices someday? Quite possibly. Which ones? It's too soon – and too close – to tell.

Let me end on that note of success versus failure. It is true that in a reasonably free market, where missions can choose their techniques from a universe of competitors, victory should constitute proof of a best practice over time. But this is not true for learning in general. Nothing succeeds like success, but nothing teaches like failure.

For example, when the military wins a war, military leaders tend to learn very little. In fact, they tend to engage in the worst type of planning mistake – they get ready to fight the last war in the next one. And they usually do poorly. However, when the opposite occurs and the military leaders lose a war, they learn plenty. Picking a fight with a military force that has lost a war, but successfully absorbed those lessons, is very dangerous. The U.S. military learned much from Vietnam, whereas Desert Storm is likely to teach it almost nothing useful in comparison.

And maybe that's why the military (and the medical world, to mention another good example) takes its codification of best practices so seriously – the lessons learned are born of failure, defeat, and death. When USAID starts looking back five to eight years from now at that first class of RFs, and what they did or did not accomplish, the autopsies will likely teach far more than the victory celebrations.

And USAID missions may well make good use of an important lesson in that harsh reality: suffer those failures openly and embrace the uncertainty they force on you. They will teach us all far more than your successes.

Essay 3

The San Francisco 49ers Analogy

In the 1980s, a famous and successful American-style football team known as the "49ers" was based in San Francisco, California. Their coach during this period was Bill Walsh. His philosophy on preparing his offensive team (those players who play when the team possesses the ball) forms the basis for this analogy concerning Results Frameworks and learning.

Most coaches of American-style football teams will study an upcoming opponent in great detail in the days and weeks preceding a game. They have access to films that record the opponent's previous games, which they study meticulously, noting their opponents' tendencies and habits, both when they play offense (have the ball) or defense (stopping the other team, which has the ball).

Often, after lengthy study of these films the team's coaches will – under the guidance of the head coach – determine which offensive plays they will attempt in the upcoming game. These plays are highly complex and choreographed movements of all 11 players in strict timing, with the goal being either to run or pass the ball down the field. Every team has dozens of these plays in its repertoire, and players study them constantly. Each play may also have numerous variations, depending on the ways in which the defending team tries to stop them from advancing the ball.

Most coaches will come into a game with a list of plays that they think will work best against the team they're facing that day. They will pick individual plays from this list after each play has concluded, sending the choice to the team leader (known as the quarterback) out on the field, using either a messenger or hand signals. The coaches must make the choice quickly, deciding – based on the success or failure of the plays immediately preceding – which play is most likely to succeed.

In this way, American-style football is often compared to warfare, with the head coach (general) directing his offensive or defensive team (troops) from afar in a series of discrete offensive (attacking) or defensive (defending) plays (tactical maneuvers) executed across a three-dimensional playing field. The coach's choices of plays are therefore the essence of adaptive planning, i.e., after each attempted play he must quickly weigh the success or failure of the previous plays and decide which single play will be most likely to succeed. Similarly, football is often compared to chess, with individual players representing the individual pieces.

What made Coach Bill Walsh of the San Francisco 49ers so different is that before each game he would pre-select his team's first 20 offensive plays. He would then have his team execute those 20 plays in strict order, regardless of the outcome of any single play. On the surface, the logic of this approach seemed to be counter-intuitive. Why did he lock himself into 20 opening moves? Why not try one play, see what happens, and then decide on play number two and so on. Why be so predetermined in a game that rewards coaches who think on their feet (i.e., those who can plan adaptively and alter their approach according to field-based indicators of success or failure?)

Walsh's logic was this: After studying the opponent's previous games, he would develop his list of 20 opening offensive plays to test the opponent's capacity across a spectrum of attacking moves (e.g., running the ball through the middle of the field or to one side or the other, or passing the ball short or long distances). In each selected play, although the proximate goal was to advance the ball to some degree, the ultimate goal of the play was to learn about the opposing team's defensive tendencies. In short, the first 20 offensive plays were Walsh's best estimates as to what might work against the opposing team's defense, and he wanted to test all these hypotheses comprehensively before deciding which ones would be selected for the rest of the contest. Thus, in those first 20 plays, Walsh ran what was, in effect, a supply-led offense (i.e., his inputs were fixed and not sensitive

to the demands of success in relation to the opposing team on defense). He did so to gather sufficient data so that he could operate a more demand-led offense (running only those plays proven successful, i.e., letting the "market place" of the game determine which plays his team ran on offense) during the rest of the game.

In essence, Walsh's system was a good compromise between the two extremes of rigid planning and totally ad hoc planning. By using this initial rigid sequence of plays to learn about his opponent, he created the necessary field-based, performance-monitoring data (answering the question: "What success did we achieve on any one play?") to allow he and his coaches to rapidly analyze the underlying causal relationships (coming to the truth that, when we do this on an offensive play, we cause the defense to respond in this way and successful movement of the ball downfield occurs). Again, the proximate goal of these first 20 plays was to move the ball downfield and score points, like any series of plays in a game, but the ultimate goal of these opening 20 plays was to learn what works best.

Once the first 20 plays were used, depending on the indicators of success and failure, variations of the most successful plays were used for the remainder of the game. Of course, the learning didn't stop there, as the coaches would rapidly analyze the success or failure of every play from that point on. The difference was that the team no longer ran plays for the ultimate purpose of learning, but to capitalize on previous (and ongoing) learning (i.e., they shifted from a total insensitivity to success to a complete embracing of the search for, and rapid reemployment of, perceived best practices).

Whenever I've heard USAID people describing the Results Framework along either extreme of a document carved in stone or one in which "the goalposts can be moved on a daily basis," I find myself thinking about Coach Walsh's approach to planning his offensive plays in a football game. To me, the RF represents the mission's best judgment for the opening phase of a far longer contest (i.e., year one of a five-to-eight year effort), or rather like Walsh's first 20 offensive plays in a football game, where you may execute 60 to 80 plays in all.

Like Walsh, the mission is committing itself to an opening series of moves designed to initiate some movement toward a longer-term strategic objective (for Walsh, winning the game in the end; for the mission, achieving the defined SO). These first-year Results Packages may well prove to be more useful in generating learning about which results tracks may prove to be the easiest or the hardest to pursue (i.e., offering the least or the most resistance to change) than in generating such changes in and of themselves.

In other words, learning output may overshadow result output in the earlier section of an RF's playing life, but only if the mission is employing Walsh's philosophy of accepting the costs of this initial learning process (i.e., the likelihood of less initial success laying the adaptive-planning groundwork for greater success in the future), and then aggressively employing those initial lessons learned in subsequent RF years or phases.

Thus, to think of the RF in the Walsh manner is to acknowledge the utility of having an opening set of moves (first-year set of Results Packages), but considering each move first as a source of learning and second as merely a candidate for continued application (or candidate for best practice for application across missions). Then, come year two (or maybe year three), one needs the will and flexibility to recognize which RPs are working and which ones are not. Funding and personnel should then be moved accordingly to capitalize on the more successful results tracks, and to abandon the less successful ones.

Using this analogy, both extreme visions of the RF, either as carved in stone or as goalposts constantly in motion, can be dismissed. Yes, you set up an RF with a certain series of opening moves or RPs, but these RPs are not guaranteed a life across the entirety of the RF. Each year you need to take stock of which RPs are moving ahead and which ones are not. You ask yourself why, and from the analysis generated by that question, you seek to further exploit your winning RPs and discard your failed ones.

But, conversely, you have to give each RP sufficient play in the RF game to allow for reasonable judgment regarding success or failure, relevancy or irrelevancy. Thus, every year's recalibrated Results

Framework (with its class of surviving RPs and any new replacements or augmenting RPs) represents a repeat of the first year's opening set of plays, but only for that subset of new RPs being introduced in that phase. Employment of those successful RPs from the previous phase represent the adaptive-planning aspect (i.e., you're running with your winning RPs, and simultaneously testing a new set of RPs designed to generate still more learning about the ultimate best course for the RF to follow toward achievement of the SO).

Essay 4

The Football Coaches Analogy

I offer this second American football analogy mostly because it's a favorite of my friends in the Africa Bureau. It has to do with maintaining a sense of interdependency or, perhaps better put, synergy across Intermediate Results (IRs) within a single Strategic Objective (SO). It also speaks to how performance monitoring and evaluation are pursued at the level of individual Results Packages.

First, let me cite the concerns that sparked my creation and use of this analogy.

If I were going to describe USAID's Sustainable Development strategy to my mother-in-law (smart lady, tenured professor in communications, but knows little of international relations and developing countries per se), I'd do it something like this:

During the Cold War, as you know, most things in our foreign policy were focused on keeping countries around the world from going over to the socialist bloc. And that overarching theme let everyone who was involved in foreign policy (such as diplomats, the military, and foreign-aid agencies) more or less off the hook in terms of proving their efficacy. I mean, if they interacted with a country and that country remained a friend of the United States and didn't go socialist, we could pretty much call those interactions a success. A crude measure, yes, but so long as that country's leader wasn't getting his picture taken in Red Square on May Day, we could assume we had achieved at least a draw, and that was enough because the whole point about containment was to wait those nasty Soviets out.

Of course, with the end of the Cold War, all that has changed. Suddenly it's not a question of keeping up the solid front or risking a perilous slide into complete surrender or universal Armageddon. Now every taxpayer – or at least every Congressperson – wants to know what the cost-benefit ratio is for every dollar spent on foreign policy. Soon your $800 military hammer looks like overkill compared to the Russians' rusty sickle.

Well, it's the same with foreign aid. People want a good sense that they're getting maximum development bang for their buck, therefore USAID came up with this new strategy of Sustainable Development, which says in effect:

This development stuff is really complex, Mr. and Mrs. Taxpayer. Okay. Maybe in the past we often worked in our various cubbyholes or stovepipes, and didn't pay enough attention to how all these projects or activities came together in one synergistic whole, but that has changed. Now we work these issues in an integrated, customer-focused, teamwork fashion so we get maximum impact for minimum dollars. We know that now we must show success less in terms of a country's "not going socialist," but rather its becoming a useful trade partner and we accept that challenge. In fact, our whole new aid-development planning system is about fostering these synergistic successes across the various "results" we'll be seeking within each of the big goals of democracy, economic growth, population and health, and the environment. And, ultimately, our new system is about fostering such synergy across these four sectors. That's the whole point of this new approach-making it all come together in a sustainable way.

Now, having said all that, my mother-in-law is likely to ask how USAID can possibly follow all these complicated activities and their related in-country effects in a way that can track whether this synergy is really occurring. She might ask, "how do you know whether all these separate lines of activity are going to come together at some point?" My response would be that tracking the synergy across the various sectoral efforts is done mostly through country-level general statistics. But within sectors, or individual SOs within sectors, this synergistic outlook is forced on the mission by the planning, achieving, and monitoring

paradigm known as the Results Framework. This whole framework approach is about ensuring that individual efforts or results come together in a logical way. No more stovepipes here!

But when my mother-in-law looks at one of these RFs, which appears to be a lot like the old objective tree arrangements (not that all do, but most), she says, "but all these boxes are connected by vertical lines that meet only at the very top-right here where these Intermediate Results join together below that Strategic Objective. Does that mean that all this synergy happens only at the end of all these results tracks? Wouldn't some be happening before then?"

At this point, I would probably switch the conversation to her grandchildren because, frankly, despite the fact that everyone at USAID seems to agree that at the IR level the logic of interconnections and synergy is obvious and compelling, we're still seeing RF construction where this interconnectedness and synergy across various IRs is missing at lower levels. In other words, you feel that any monitoring that will occur will be focused solely on the question: are we moving up this results track? And not on the more oblique but potentially as important question of whether these lower-level results-monitoring efforts indicating the development of the synergy we ultimately expect will occur across these separate IRs? Or are these separate IR-results tracks seemingly developing in splendid isolation?

Consequently, on this issue of indicators that may be too insularly focused on results within individual IRs, I think you're still seeing RF construction that reflects a certain degree of stovepipe thinking. And frankly some of it seems to be the result of the graphics, i.e., using that old, hierarchical, vertically arrayed (logframe?) system of displaying linearly defined (all in a neat chain of events) causality tracks that show these separate lines of results running up (oblivious to one another?). They then come together at this seemingly arbitrary level of the IRs. Isn't this the standard that pops up so often? Not everywhere, mind you (Madagascar's out-of-the-box renditions truly seek to escape that rigid logic), but in most places? Because, I must admit that I am confused when I approach this problem from the outside and I read the Sustainable Development material and see RFs in which all the proposed synergy (i.e., where various tracks actually come together and lines connect the boxes horizontally, as well as vertically) only seems to occur somewhere down the road.

In fact, I find myself thinking, does this synergy occur at this high IR level when the Minister of Forestry walks across the hall to confer with the Minister of Agriculture, after which they come to an agreement that the results tracks developing within the purview of each's ministry have now matured to the point where connectivity must occur? Or does it just as likely occur (first) within some distant village, where Household Head A walks across the path to Household Head B, and A's environment-related decision synergistically interacts with B's income-generation-related decision? If the latter event is potentially just as important, why does the RF seem to recognize and look for connectivity only at this artificially high level of IRs? In other words, shouldn't each layer or phase of RPs – no matter where they fit in the layout of an overall RF – be viewed, constructed, and operated with a close eye to the cross-IR synergy necessary to make that Strategic Objective a sustainable reality? Aren't missions building this Sustainable Development, with all its synergistic glory, at each and every phase of these coterminously operated IRs? Or is Sustainable Development something that only happens somewhere up ahead, when all these individual result lines come together?

I know I'm looking for a fight here by tossing out all these quick and dirty questions (some even have the tone of accusations). By accepting (I'll assume) the challenge of such questions by an outsider whose familiarity with your workings is only so-so (admittedly and by design, because fresh perspectives require a certain amount of useful ignorance, and if I'm not making you angry enough to either successfully defend yourself or grudgingly agree with me, then I'm basically wasting your time), let me now toss out that American football analogy.

When I run across examples of thinking that say to me that RFs are being planned, built, operated, or monitored as isolated tracks of results (or where IRs come together synergistically only at some high,

abstract level), then I think of the following analogy from football:

Imagine a head coach is assembling his various assistants to plan next week's game. He has, for example, his offensive team's four main coaches, who correspond to the major specialized player positions:

- the quarterbacks' coach (the quarterbacks lead the team by either handing off the ball to runners or passing it downfield to receivers);
- the running backs' coach (the backs run the ball);
- the receivers' coach (the receivers catch the ball);
- the linesmen's coach (the linesmen are the blockers who protect the quarterback as he waits to throw or clear the way for the runners with the ball).

These four coaches work with vastly different players who have vastly different tasks, and who prepare for games in vastly different ways. These coaches and players represent cultures easily as different and unique as any collection of USAID personnel distributed across various Results Package Teams within a collective RF, even if they are functionally defined (like a training RP.)

So the head coach has his four coaches, but instead of having them sit down and plan for the next week's game in unison (as is the usual practice), he lets them all go off to their separate offices, spend a lot of time researching next week's opponent, each according to his own specialty, and interact closely with their respective partners—i.e., the players in each of their position specialities. Each coach, with his respective players, then develops a separate game plan. Moreover, each develops his own measures of effectiveness for his positions, but only covering those aspects of performance for which he feels his players can reasonably be held accountable (after all, these players are evaluated for raises each year, and what's fair is fair.)

For example, the linesmen's coach says he will give his players two brownie points for every time they push the opposing lineman back at least 3 yards on a play. Nice measure, however, it doesn't relate to anything else, such as whether that action does something useful to further the overall efforts of the team on any particular play. But this action is definitely measurable and within the domain of the linesmen's responsibility, or results, therefore it seems fair.

Here's another example: The quarterbacks' coach says he will give the quarterbacks three brownie points every time they manage to throw the ball downfield in less than five seconds after the start of any passing play (a play that uses a throw of the ball to receivers positioned downfield). Not bad. You certainly don't want to have your quarterback hold on to the ball too long before passing (or he'll get tackled to the ground by defenders and the play will end). But what about somebody catching the ball? That's not something the quarterback can control. It wouldn't be fair to make him responsible for that result, would it?

And, finally, one more example: Let's say the receivers' coach declares he will give his players two brownie points every time they manage to run their pass pattern (choreographed movement downfield to reach a spot where they can catch a pass according to a strict timing) accurately and on time. Also sounds good and fair and imminently within their sphere of results-oriented responsibilities. What about catching the ball? Ah, that depends too much on somebody else's intermediate results – not something the receivers can control. After all, the quarterback has to throw it to them accurately, and the linesmen have to have blocked the defenders long enough for the quarterback to be able to throw that ball downfield to them. Can't penalize the receivers if all that causality doesn't occur right in a row. They need to have indicators that make sense within their respective areas of responsibility.

When game day comes, the various coaches are overseeing their respective players, grading each performance according to the measures of effectiveness specific to their position. Meanwhile, the poor head coach is trying to get these groups to work together toward the strategic objective of the game – i.e., move the ball into the end zone, score more points than the opponent, and win the game. But the head coach is getting little support from his assistants, lost as they are in their individualized – even stovepiped – efforts at both performance and performance measurement.

Maybe these assistants assume all these disparate working pieces of what should be a highly integrated and synergistic team effort will come together just before the end of the game, score a lot of points, and pull out a victory. Then again, maybe their collective cause is hopeless. After all, this is a team sport, a game in which success must be pursued – from the very beginning through the very end – in a highly integrated and synergistic fashion.

What might have saved this effort? Perhaps the recognition that indicators within individual position groups have to be cast in terms of how those individual performances or results mattered in terms of the other position groups. In other words, don't tell me how your linesmen did things well that only relate to linesmen, tell me how what they did (or didn't do) well made a positive (or negative) contribution to the others' performance. Moreover, develop indicators within the respective player groups that speak to the collective accomplishments of the team as a whole (e.g., show me how the linesmen's blocking of defenders meant that runners carrying the ball were able to score enough points to beat the opponent). In short, cast every indicator and plan every result across the individual player groups in a way that will focus attention on how each group sustains the overall effort from beginning to end, and not solely in some ultimate tallying of the final result.

It's my impression that the RF strategy is largely a team effort across the IRs identified. As such, indicators within any one IR may often be meaningless in terms of saying anything useful about the progress of the RF's implementation, unless the IRs are cast in terms of how they sustain similarly good developments in other IRs.

I know that such a blanket statement ignores the question of a threshold below which individual results (and their indicators) may legitimately make sense only within that IR. Fair enough. And maybe that's a good question for leading one to figure out how – and where – on each IR or results track one starts to craft indicators that "reach out" to other IRs within the RF, and thus begin to test the hypotheses that are presumed to link them. Certainly, no SO team should leave itself in the position of having a monitoring system that tests the causal links between IRs only at the RFs' endgame (i.e., at some distant causal point five to eight years down the road, when all these IRs are supposed to come together). Surely, any SO Team wants some indicator feedback on these most important causal links as early in the RF implementation process as possible.

These are no doubt hard questions. Finding answers will be difficult. But all I'm asking here is this: Are the RPs within each IR, and the monitoring systems that track them all, sufficiently addressing this issue of synergy across IRs to allow missions the necessary data and confidence-over the lifetimes of individual RFs-to accurately identify the winning and losing results tracks and enable them to exploit the winners and discard the losers? And if not, how is this new OPS system any different from the old, when all is said and done and IRs live out their five-to-eight-year lives in the same safe way that old projects went on forever? How is the highly synergistic goal of Sustainable Development ensured? How is adaptive planning achieved?

How do you make sure that your team wins?

Nine Issues Concerning USAID's New OPS System:

How Recent Institutional Experiences Within the U.S. Military Might Point to Some Useful Solutions

INTRODUCTION

This report was produced by CNA, Corporation for the Natural Resources Management Unit of the Division of Productive Sector Growth and Environment in the Office of Sustainable Development, Africa Bureau, United States Agency for International Development (NRM/PSGE/SD/AFR/USAID.) This work was conducted under a Fixed-Price Purchase Order agreement as part of the extant Environmental Planning and Management Project operated under USAID Global Bureau's Center for the Environment.

The report constitutes the final deliverable under the Purchase Order, identified in the Statement of Work as the "final report listing key issues/ approaches which the USAID operations (OPS) system needs to consider in order to learn best practices elsewhere in the USG of relevance to USAID's mandate and operational realities."

This report is written for USAID personnel and partners familiar with the detailed workings of the new OPS system as defined by:

- The final report of the USAID Business Area Analysis Team for Operations, entitled Making a Difference for Development: Reengineering the U.S. Agency for International Development's Program Operations;
- The Automated Directives Series concerning the new OPS system;
- The internal debates about various aspects of the new OPS system as captured in the USAID Reengineering newsletter; and
- *On Track,* as well as the Internet-based discussion groups known as the Results Framework Network (RFNET) and the Results Framework Technical Network (RFTechNet).

FORMAT OF THE REPORT

The report focuses on nine separate issues concerning USAID's new OPS system. Each issue is presented in the following format:

- Observation – Describes one troubling or disputed aspect of the new OPS system.
- Analogous discussion – Relates the observation to a similar institutional experience faced by some part of the U.S. military in its recent past.
- Recommendation – Unites the observation and analogy into a concrete step USAID might consider in dealing with the identified issue.

Issue 1

An Appropriate Focus on Host-Country Endstates

OBSERVATION

USAID's Sustainable Development strategy focuses attention and resources on those host countries it considers best bets to offer a strong development return on the investment made, while taking a tougher line on those nations where success is seen as unachievable in terms of sustainability. In other words, USAID's new focus on results is based on picking "winners" and avoiding "sinkholes." The new OPS system works implicitly toward identifying opportunities to maximize USAID's development investments by fostering programmatic flexibility within Strategic Objectives, i.e., the funding should follow, or flow toward, successes.

Taken a logical step further, USAID's new results orientation implies a time limit on any mission's efforts within a host country, i.e., a foreign aid equivalent to domestic welfare reform. Success must be occurring. Otherwise, the money should flow elsewhere, and, presumably, the mission would ultimately close out its operations. If success is occurring, more funding should flow to speed up the process. If the process is sped up, an endstate can and must be reached whereupon country graduation can occur. If one closes the loop on this logic, all missions should have, as part of their strategic planning, a clear and unambiguous definition of what such a successfully achieved endstate should look like. Planning for results means planning for success, and planning for success means graduation by some reasonable length of time.

ANALOGOUS DISCUSSION

Since the end of the Cold War (and really since the Korean War,) U.S. decision-makers have had to adjust to the American public's desire to limit the length of any intervention overseas. (Much like they increasingly voice worries about a "never-ending" flow of aid to countries that never seems to advance as a result.) This view is commonly described in terms of "avoiding another Vietnam," or "avoiding a quagmire." Vietnam, then, is viewed as the worst historical example of a military "sinkhole," i.e., an intervention that was essentially unwinnable regardless of the resources poured into it. Countering that example is the Persian Gulf War, seen as the best example of the U.S. military's being given clear objectives and sufficient resources to go into the situation, achieving the limited objective, and then rather quickly pulling out.

The military's strong focus on limiting the duration of any overseas intervention to its barest minimum is seen in the emphasis it places on defining, a priori, the endstate conditions necessary to end the campaign. This endstate definition is easily the most contentious and highlighted aspect of the exhaustive pre-campaign planning that occurs between the Unified Military Commands around the world, which will conduct the campaign directly, and the Joint Staff back in the Pentagon, which has overall management of operations.

The agreements they reach are analogous to those achieved between USAID missions and USAID/Washington (USAID/W) in that nothing can occur until both agree and permission is granted by headquarters. Once that permission is given, control over operations resides largely in the hands of the Unified Commander on the scene. Many in the military view this pre-campaign planning process as being so complicated and involved that, in comparison, actually promulgating the operations often appears more straightforward, as paradoxical as that sounds. Thus the phrase, "Crisis is hard, war is easy," i.e., planning is hard, execution is easier.

Again, the most difficult aspect of this pre-campaign planning involves the definition of the endstate

necessary before operations can cease and troops can withdraw. This process is made all the more difficult and contentious by the new types of interventions the U.S. military has been asked to perform since the end of the Cold War. Unlike the more traditional military operations that focus on the destruction of opposing forces, increasingly the U.S. Armed Forces are being asked to go into so-called failed states to help reestablish the minimal conditions of order necessary for the host country government and in-country private voluntary organizations and non-government organizations to be able to pursue their normal operations, e.g., after a natural disaster, or upon social chaos created by internal warfare.

Much like USAID, then, the U.S. military is increasingly forced into thinking about and defining those obstacles to the normal social, political, and economic functioning of a country that must be removed before ending U.S. military operations there (and likewise how best to cooperate with other nations' militaries in such efforts.) Clearly, the military focuses its attention on the more basic end of the spectrum than do USAID missions (to jump to a medical analogy, the military's focus is more like that of emergency room personnel.) The focus on the definition of and the step-by-step elimination of obstacles to the eventual cessation of U.S. in-country operations is, however, essentially the same, as are the profound conceptual and practical difficulties in planning and achieving such a progression.

But what's most instructive here is the military's zealous concentration on the achievement of the endstate. It infuses all of its planning and execution, it provides a strong institutional focus from top to bottom, and it illuminates every aspect of its in-operations monitoring and evaluation of success. (This goal is achieved by asking over and over again, "Does this activity move us closer to the endstate?") The military believes that the longer it remains in any intervention, the more likely that "mission creep" will occur, i.e., it will be drawn increasingly into activities that are superfluous or, even worse, counterproductive to the achievement of endstate. In short, the mission will be modified beyond its original intent and, worst of all, extended.

RECOMMENDATION

Like the military's endstate planning, USAID missions are inherently in the business of "developing themselves out of business." To do this, missions need explicitly defined endstates that point to those minimum enabling conditions necessary to allow the host country's successful graduation. Since Results Frameworks (RFs) are limited to a 5- to 8-year time frame, such an endstate definition may well require a lengthier planning horizon say 10 to 15 years, with the continued tracking of results not being limited to the point of graduation. Investments made within the mission's existence should continue to bear fruit far beyond the pullout date, and these successes should be captured for both public accountability and public relations.

To say such an additional horizon only increases the planning requirements of missions already overburdened with the same misses the point. An 8-year RF that operates within, say, a 12-year endstate deadline and is not explicitly linked to any endstate or graduation strategy is very disjointed planning indeed, with disruption of the mission's operating focus the most likely outcome. Likewise, to say that such an endstate focus forces a cruel and unfair deadline on countries struggling to develop misses the larger point of the Sustainable Development philosophy development is real only if it is sustainable, and sustainability is real only after country graduation and USAID's departure.

Issue 2

Strategic Objectives Operating in Vacuums: The Evils of Stovepiping

OBSERVATION

USAID's overarching strategy of Sustainable Development is centered on the idea that fostering positive synergy among four identified pillars, democracy, the environment, economic development, and health/population, is the essential element of successful aid. Sustainability is an illusion unless the development encouraged cuts across these four sectors and builds mutually reinforcing bonds among them. In short, it is either "one for all and all for one," or nothing of lasting value is likely to be achieved.

For example, the most important successes to be achieved in democracy and governance are those that trigger related successes in the other three sectors. A success in democracy and governance that is not traceable, in terms of impact, to related successes in the other three sectors would be of far lesser value, because that success itself could not be sustained, i.e., democracy will fail without progress in the other areas.

Having said that, where is the evidence that missions are planning Results Frameworks for individual Strategic Objectives (SOs) that explicitly and consistently seek to define or prove causal linkages across SOs? Or across sectors? Or even simply seek out evidence of positive cross-sectoral impact in terms of monitoring and evaluation?

For example, both natural resources management and democracy and governance activities often overlap on the issue of empowering local populations toward more control over their local environs. Are the RFs being drawn up in these two sectors being crafted in such a way as to explore the obvious overlap? Are measures of effectiveness and impact employed in each SO's Results Packages ever directed outward toward the other sector? Or are these sensors always pointed inwards, capturing impact only within that SO? Within that sector? The new OPS system was designed to break down barriers not only within sectors, but across them as well. Within USAID, there seems some genuine agreement that stovepiping by functional offices has decreased dramatically under the new OPS system, but can the same be said across developmental sectors, not just in terms of meetings attended, but in terms of RFs created, SOT operations, and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems defined?

ANALOGOUS DISCUSSION

The U.S. military comprises four services: the Army, the Air Force, the Navy, and the Marine Corps. During the Cold War era, each service focused the bulk of its planning and training on defending against its Soviet counterpart service. Cooperation among the four U.S. military services was rather minimal (mostly centered around transportation, logistics, or deconfliction, i.e., avoiding fratricide,) as each strove over the years to make itself as self-sufficient as possible. Not surprisingly, this approach led to substantial duplication of effort, but, as long as the Soviet threat continued, such overlap was considered a useful margin of safety. In matters of basic security, redundancy can be a good thing.

With the decrease and eventual cessation of the Cold War rivalry with the Soviet Union, however, came a new way of thinking within the Defense Department. No longer a matter of life-and-death competition with the Soviets, national security funding came under far greater scrutiny, and, with it, so too did these substantial overlaps in service capabilities. In place of the old services, drive for self-sufficiency, i.e., separate missions in separate environments, the Defense Department began pushing the concept of

"jointness," which is viewed as being the most effective and efficient way to combine service capabilities in any substantial military operation.

This concept had essentially lay dormant since it was effectively written into law in the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986. Naturally, the services continued to resist such integration, and a substantial period of time (from the mid-1980s until the mid-1990s, one could argue) was required for this approach to gain enough momentum throughout the Defense Department for the individual services to reorient their personnel management systems, i.e., promotions, to both encourage and reward individuals toward (and for) career paths considered "purple." (Purple is seen as the color reflective of jointness in the same way that green is considered emblematic of the Army, light blue for the Air Force, and so on.)

Over the past five years, the institutional maturation of the concept of jointness has spread throughout the areas of doctrine, training, planning, and operations. The pervasiveness of the jointness concept is now seen in how each service increasingly defines success in terms of how it enables the other services to do their jobs better. Each service still retains unique functions that are "self-enabling," i.e., they allow the individual service to perform a function with little need for help from other services. However, the further you go up the military services' equivalent of a Results Framework, i.e., from the rearmost activity all the way up to those implemented on the front lines of operations, the more you see success and measures of effectiveness defined in terms of what this or that capability does to augment or enable the capability of the other three services, and vice versa.

This synergy is crucial because the military has increasingly come to realize that any one service trying to mount its own campaigns is largely self-limiting, inefficient, and therefore unsustainable unless it provides enabling conditions for the other services as well, and is, in turn, enabled by them. All four services are seen as integral to a successful military operation. Anything less and the U.S. public simply is not getting its money's worth.

RECOMMENDATION

A USAID doctrinal equivalent of "jointness" needs to emerge to link the new OPS system with the underlying logic of Sustainable Development. This doctrine needs to encourage, to the fullest extent feasible, Results Packages, Results Frameworks, and Strategic Objectives across sectors. This linking must occur most prominently in terms of monitoring and evaluation. If positive cross-sectoral spillovers cannot be identified within individual RFs, how can it be assumed that any such sustainability is being achieved across the SOs pursued by any one mission? In other words, Sustainable Development cannot be some hoped-for effect that is measurable only far downstream. If it can not be identified within an individual SO throughout most of the corresponding RF's "lifetime," it is probably not occurring.

Issue 3

Congressional Oversight and Funding by Strategic Objective: Why Such a Lack of Trust?

OBSERVATION

A fundamental tenet of the new OPS system is that the flow of funding, at least below the level of the mission's Strategic Objectives, will be essentially demand-led. In other words, the money chases developmental "demand" within the host country. Wherever USAID successes occur, that is where more money should flow most over the lifetime of the Results Framework, and, conversely, wherever USAID experiences failures, that is where the money should dry up. In the demand-led funding stream, the money should flow toward developmental opportunities as they arise and are identified, much like investment follows business opportunities in a free- market economy.

For this aspect of the new OPS system to function correctly, Results Packages cannot be fixed units with lives of their own like the old USAID programs. RPs must rise and fall according to local demand, and not according to some arbitrary supply-led logic imposed from on high, be it either USAID/W or Congress. This means that, at the very least, obligation by SO must be the norm, so SO Teams can shift funds as needed in midstream to meet the local market's changing demand. This is the essence of the adaptive planning paradigm, contracting functions being decentralized to the level of local personnel operating on the front lines, that must permeate the new OPS system.

But what if Congress will not go along? Naturally, a certain amount of earmarking will continue. Few within USAID will argue that funding across the agency's major parts will be decided according to a demand-led approach, i.e., above the level of the missions, the game still remains far too political for that. If Congress refuses to let missions obligate by SO and thus control their investment strategies directly, does the new system fail as a whole?

In other words, if USAID's top management finesses this issue with Congress in such a way that funding remains fixed at the old program/new Results Packages level, has the agency simply triggered the Thermidor, or counter- revolution, that stops this long-running organizational revolution in its tracks? Has it unwittingly succumbed to a fatal flaw that ultimately renders Results-Oriented Operations Reengineering (ROOR) impotent in terms of sustainable change?

ANALOGOUS DISCUSSION

The rise of the information age fundamentally transformed military warfare, but some types of militaries adapted to this revolution better than others. It used to be said that "he who moves stuff around the fastest wins." In other words, the ability to move troops, weapons, and ammunition around the battlefield faster than the opponent was seen as the surest route to victory. Now, with the information revolution, many military experts amend that old aphorism thusly: "He who moves information around the fastest wins." This doesn't mean it doesn't still come down to troops in the field and bombs on targets, but rather that "all things being equal" the surest route to victory nowadays is thought to be managing information better than your opponent does.

The most effective way for militaries to take advantage of this information revolution in warfare is to decentralize the command-and-control function to the greatest extent possible. All this high-tech information flow is rather useless in terms of speed unless it is

delivered quickly to personnel on the front lines with both their fingers on the trigger and the authority to pull those triggers as indicated by the battlefield data as it pours in. If this information flow has to travel up and down some lengthy and unwieldy chain of command, the advantage of speed is lost. Although some might intuitively believe that a faster and broader information flow should allow for more layers of administrative oversight, the obverse is actually true if you're talking about taking advantage of the decision "speed" offered by this rapid information flow so as to make adaptive planning a reality.

A better and faster information flow should afford greater confidence in the frontline troops' capacity for making the right call. Otherwise, this information revolution has only created more paperwork and additional decision bottlenecks. Personnel on the front lines must be trusted to make the right decisions, be empowered, and have the authority to exploit opportunities as they arise in the heat of the battle.

Armies of democratic countries are more adept at adjusting to this fundamental challenge of the information revolution than those of non-democratic states. They are more willing to decentralize military authority. Many military experts believe the real reason the United States has the finest military in the world is that the people accept the challenge of empowerment forced upon the institution as a whole by the information age.

An average noncommissioned officer in the U.S. Armed Forces typically has greater command-and-control authority in the battlefield than most countries' generals, and especially more so than generals of militaries in authoritarian or totalitarian regimes where real authority is concentrated in the hands of a small, elite leadership.

The U.S. Armed Forces can trust its own people much more than the militaries of less-democratic nations can, primarily because of their training. Doctrine, or the military's corporate body of knowledge concerning "best practices," however, is the ultimate reason. Probably the most important of these best practices is the ability to discern those situations where an individual, no matter where he or she is in the chain of command, needs to take the matter in hand and make a "command decision."

This doctrine of best practices, especially those involving when and how to make decisions in the field, is drilled into all military personnel throughout their careers. However, the even more important translation of these best practices into operational reality comes in the specific rules of engagement that the military draws up every time it prepares for a campaign or operation. These guidelines, known as ROE, define basic rules of thumb that all military personnel are to use as a reasoning framework for tactical decisions they will be forced to make in the field at a moment's notice. These ROE are typically printed on cards for distribution before operations begin.

Creating these ROE for every operation is an operation in and of itself, one fraught with a plethora of politically sensitive questions that often involve a wide range of policymakers from across the U.S. Government. These policymakers fight it out during the delineation of these ROE, but once these ROE are signed off by all the concerned political masters back in Washington and handed back over to the Unified Commander-in-Chief (CINC) of all forces within the region (who, with his staff, typically generated the bulk of the draft ROE guidelines in the first place,) control over the employment of these ROE is likewise handed over to the Unified CINC (although "tweaking" of the ROE by political masters is a constant.)

This individual, armed with his overarching campaign plan that was similarly hashed out with the political leadership back in Washington, is then essentially in control over the day-to-day issues of implementation through his oversight of his subordinate unified commander on scene at the crisis. The "big picture" of the campaign plan tells him what his Washington superiors expect of him in general, but within that framework he is relatively free to alter his tactics as required by the situation in the field, as are many of his subordinates out in the field leading the rank-and-file troops.

These subordinate commanders have their own delineated responsibilities and goals that are linked to one another through the causal logic of the campaign

plan, and they can not alter their respective objectives without checking with the next-level commander above them. But as far as achieving results within their respective tasks, which can be thought of as equivalents to Results Packages, they are allowed a significant degree of operational freedom of action.

On the face of it, this setup of tactical freedom within operating units sounds like a recipe for chaos and disaster, especially in an event as complicated, uncertain, and prone to unforeseen snafus as a military campaign. So how does it all hold together? Again, the proximate answer is training, while the ultimate answer is the general doctrine and specific rules of engagement that define tactical "best practices."

If not for the careful and consistent employment of general military doctrine and specific ROE for individual operations, it is likely that the military would find itself subjected to the same kind of micro-managing oversight from U.S. political leaders as USAID often receives from Congress.

USAID clearly faces political and strategic challenges as complex, or even more complex, as those faced by the military in any overseas intervention, yet one could argue that it often enjoys less freedom of action in the field than the military does, even after both have hammered out detailed agreements with their political masters concerning the goals and operational approaches to be employed, i.e., the SO with accompanying RF and the campaign plan, respectively.

Is it because USAID's efforts cost more? Hardly. Is it because USAID'S potential failures are more damaging? Again, hardly. Is it because USAID's activities unfold at a far slower rate and thus invite micro-managing? Perhaps, but doesn't that slower pace of action also suggest less danger in allowing USAID personnel on the front lines greater freedom of action? And doesn't the potentially long-lasting and profound legacies of USAID activities likewise suggest a need for greater empowerment of onsite personnel so they can act more swiftly to alter efforts as dictated by local events?

So why can't USAID, armed with this new OPS system designed to foster adaptive planning in the field, get any respect from Congress on an issue as fundamental to this new system as obligating by Strategic Objective?

RECOMMENDATION

USAID needs to define an explicit doctrine for the new OPS system that, in layman's terms, explains the system's central tenets of adaptive planning and demand-led funding below the level of the mission's Strategic Objectives. This doctrine not only needs to be drilled into every USAID employee, contractor, and partner, but made the central argument in USAID management's negotiations with Congress on the question of funding by Strategic Objective and not below.

Moreover, a serious and agency-wide assessment needs to be undertaken on the manner in which decision-making authority has actually been delegated under the new system. Anecdotal evidence from a wide variety of sources indicates that, in many instances, the new system has led to even more steps in the review and approval process than in the past. A true atmosphere of adaptive planning in the field requires minimizing layers of bureaucratic oversight. If USAID-Washington shows such little trust in its own people in the field, how can it expect any better from Congress?

Issue 4

The Dark Side of Any Reengineering Revolution: The Bureaucratic Paths of Least Resistance

OBSERVATION

It is said that all revolutions carry within them the seeds of their own potential destruction, if not in their design or planning, then often in the habits and tendencies of their human masters. The jury is still out on whether the new OPS system was designed well enough to accomplish all the lofty institutional and operational goals to which it aspires, but as for the defendant known as human nature, it's best to assume guilty until proven innocent. It is no secret that the dark side of any attempted institutional reengineering lies in the tendencies of personnel to take the bureaucratic paths of least resistance when it comes to implementing changes, i.e., insufficient follow-through on the revolutionary rhetoric and plans.

This bureaucratic path of least resistance can be seen in a myriad of collective, passive-aggressive responses, all of which lead the institution to that suboptimal outcome, known colloquially as "new wine in old bottles." In short, when faced with the prospect of having to change their behavior due to the handing down from on high of new policies, regulations, tools, and so on, many personnel will simply choose to fit these new instruments within their old universe of habits rather than alter those habits to embrace the new instruments.

The biggest and most prevalent example of this behavior in the new OPS system is the growing perception that the Results Framework is nothing more than some merging of old planning frameworks (Objective Trees and Logframe.) At the start of ROR, it seemed apparent to many within USAID, and to most on the outside, that neither the Objective Trees nor Logframe was doing the job. In fact, if these two centerpieces of USAID planning were not dysfunctional to some significant degree, why reengineer the entire planning system?

When the Results Framework paradigm was originally introduced, few championing the idea would have stooped to calling it merely the combination of two planning tools just declared inadequate for the agency's needs, and yet, less than two years later this "revolutionary" instrument of the RF is touted "reassuringly" by some in top management as nothing more frightening, and one must assume, challenging, than a merger of these two down-but-not-out planning instruments.

ANALOGOUS DISCUSSION

It is a profoundly revolutionary challenge for USAID to switch quickly from its old supply-led planning system, where adaptive planning was rare, to one in which funding flows not only according to local demand but is subject to rapid and consistent adaptive planning. This shift forces, in naval lingo, a "sea change" of perspective and thinking. No matter how dramatic any institutional revolution, rank-and-file personnel are often faced with the reality that everything, every process, every tool, every regulation, can not be changed at once. In short, a certain amount of adapting the old to the new is inevitable, but having the persistent follow-through on the core of the revolutionary change is essential for any institutional transformation to become real and sustainable. Otherwise, what's the point?

The U.S. Navy faced a similarly daunting "sea change" in perspective following the end of the Cold War. During its decades-long rivalry with the Soviet

Navy, the U.S. Navy defined its core mission as sea control, i.e., the ability to hold and defend large portions of the high seas in such a way as to ensure the integrity of this country's "sea lines of communication" with allies around the world. With the demise of the Soviet threat, and soon thereafter the horrendous decline of the Soviet Navy itself, the U.S. Navy found itself unchallengeable on the high seas. In effect, its core mission had been obviated by the end of the superpower rivalry.

Faced with the prospect of irrelevancy within U.S. warfighting doctrine (and feeling that it should have been more in charge of its own operations during Operation Desert Storm,) the U.S. Navy essentially reengineered itself for more concentrated, close-to-land types of conflicts in the post-Cold War era. That meant shifting from a focus on sea control to one of "influencing events on land." Instead of concentrating on destroying opposing navies on the high seas, the U.S. Navy now concentrates on joining with the other armed services to achieve synergized "battlespace dominance" in the littoral area, the area where land and oceans meet.

Because most naval vessels are inherently multipurpose in nature, this "sea change" in perspective meant that the Navy would have to operate its platforms in radically different ways, and especially in coordination with U.S. land and air forces. Still, some naval vessels, such as attack submarines, owed much of their design, function, and certainly their gross numbers to the old Soviet threat.

For the submarine community, this shift to a littoral focus was viewed by many as tantamount to bureaucratic suicide. But they fought back, and much of the reasoning they've used in their arguments employs serious distortions of the logic of this new naval littoral doctrine. For example, for decades the submarine community celebrated its status as the ultimate stealthy naval platform, i.e., it could remain hidden from the enemy.

Now, taking the bureaucratic path of least resistance, the submarine community touts as one of its primary functions the provision of naval "presence" around the globe. In short, what was once the Navy's ultimate stealth platform now tries to market itself as an effective provider of visible "presence" for crisis-response operations in littoral waters. Sound Orwellian? To many, it is. Sound any more hypocritical than calling a Results Framework nothing more than the Frankenstein-like joining of the Objective Tree and Logframe?

So, will the Navy get rid of submarines, even if it took its revolutionary new doctrine to its obvious conclusions? Not a chance. The U.S. Navy has a tremendous cost sunk in the substantial capability of submarines, even if they seem of lesser combat value in this immediate era. Times can and always do change, so hedging against uncertainty usually makes sense. And, no doubt, much of the same thinking drives USAID management to portray the RF as some not-too-painful evolution from previously dominant planning instruments.

After all, USAID still has to "answer the mail" during all this revolutionary change, and casually tossing out well-established capabilities can be opposed, in good faith, as the equivalent of "tossing out the baby with the bath water." On the other hand, USAID operates now, toward results, rather than hanging around for some unforeseen war, and to a large extent, this is where the analogy begins to break down – there are no submarine equivalents in USAID's world.

So where's the middle ground here? Where do you draw the line between "change for change's sake" and "throwing in the towel" too early on this revolution?

RECOMMENDATION

USAID has already established a reasonable timetable for institutional change (which can be thought of as a trial period for an aggressive, no-holds-barred, no-backtracking-allowed pursuit of the new OPS system): the projected lifetime of the Results Framework, or 5 to 8 years. For at least a minimum of 5 years, this new OPS system must be carried to its logical conclusions, with both management and rank-and-file employees resisting the bureaucratic paths of least resistance, the most egregious being the tendency to interpret the RF as only a grab-bag redux of old planning instruments.

This is not to say that USAID should not try to adapt these old planning tools to the new system, because anything else would be foolhardy within the current budgetary climate. However, the key idea here is adapting the old to the new and not vice versa. A subtle difference perhaps, but one that lays the burden of proof on those who focus on that which remains the same, i.e., the reality of many "old bottles," versus those who concentrate on what is truly revolutionary and new.

Issue 5

Reengineering Over Time

OBJECTIVE

Institutionalizing a revolution as profound as USAID's new OPS system is like owning a house – your list of 'things to do' never quite gets down to zero. Reengineering a bureaucracy as large and as mature as USAID is not something you can complete with a task force, or even many task forces issuing reports upon reports. Nor is it finished by a cascade of training experiences, a parade of consultants, or even the publication of the snazziest of electronic handbooks.

Reengineering is made real only by doing that thing you do over and over again as you progressively take on board new aspects of the reengineered system and test them against the same harsh realities that sent you to the drawing board in the first place. All the reengineering work done up to now within USAID is the equivalent of "bringing the horse to water." Reengineering as a process created by "them" is never going to get this horse to drink. Only the rank-and-file personnel in the field can finish off process.

So the questions, "Are we there yet?" "Aren't we finished with all this reengineering stuff?" and so on essentially miss the point. As does any rush to define "best practices." You can't give out advice on parenting until you've had the chance to raise a couple of children (and probably get one into college.) Likewise, you can't start definitively citing the dos and don'ts of Results Frameworks until you've managed to get a few to maturity, and USAID won't reach that point until a year or so into the next century.

But if missions need guidelines to sort through what's needed and what's not in this new OPS system, shouldn't USAID/W be doing everything it can to identify best practices and spread that word? There's more harm than good to be found in any rushed effort. The new OPS system was purposely designed to move USAID away from a mode of thought that said "the more control the better." Too much control gets you central planning. It gets you supply-led planning. It gets you solutions looking for problems. It gets you 100 Toyotas on the dock and people trying to figure out what should be done with them.

Instead, the new OPS system is designed to force the agency to embrace more uncertainty in its planning, to act more like a business trying to capitalize on marketing opportunities as they arise in host countries, to listen more closely to its local customers. It would be nice if someone could come up with hard and fast rules on how to do this right from the start, but doesn't that sound a bit counter-intuitive given the goals? Sort of like some business guru's book telling you to "always plan for the unexpected!" ("But if I could plan for it, it wouldn't be unexpected!")

Another type of danger lurks in the too-fast gleaning of experience from the field. Remember, the new OPS system forces a huge change in operating perspective from supply-led to demand-led thinking, and with any perspective change that profound, early implementation is likely to yield more bad examples than good. That's just human nature. For example, a recent informal polling of Chiefs of Party (COP) of a large USAID contracting firm indicated that only a handful of these five dozen COPs were actually invited to join SO Teams. This situation occurred despite core values of partnership and empowerment and a proposed Results Framework methodology that stresses accounting for the activities and contributions of USAID collaborators. And yet, if one weren't careful, would not this seemingly closed-door definition of an SO Team soon be enshrined as an Agency best practice?

ANALOGOUS DISCUSSION

When the U.S. Navy finally decided to reengineer itself following the end of the Cold War, its rank-and-file membership was nonetheless deeply divided over

RECOMMENDATION

USAID must avoid the temptation to declare, prematurely, victories or failures in what is necessarily an ongoing and long-term effort to institutionalize the products and plans of its recent reengineering effort. It must dramatically slow down the rush to discover best practices, and avoid enshrining any anecdotal evidence from the field too early. What a Country Experimentation Lab does is not necessarily a best practice (emphasizing the word experimentation.) What the majority of missions do is not necessarily a best practice, e.g., it may be unique to the situation and an example of empowerment rather than a technique of universal applicability.

That which makes a RF succeed over the course of its implementation is possibly a best practice, if the experience is widespread and repeatable, but that knowledge will take years to confirm. Mistakes are far easier to discover in the short run than best practices, and, often, discovering them has far more positive long-term impact.

Remember, the phrase "trial and error" assumes failure as a front-loaded input to experience. USAID should establish an organization dedicated to the long-term collection and analysis of doctrine-generating experiences from the field. This body cannot be Washington-centered or staffed. Its center of gravity must lie with the missions. The generation of doctrine is inherently a bottom-up process. If the organization created smacks more of a Politburo than a House of Representatives, genuine doctrine will not be generated, only directives from on high.

Another way to think of this proposed organization is that it must be significantly detached from USAID's executive branch. If the Operations Business Area Analysis effort can be thought of as the "new USAID's Constitutional Congress," this doctrine-judging body must be something closer to a Supreme Court, or something that picks its judgments from among the best arguments that wind their way up from the local courts (read missions) around the "land." If this body enjoys no "separation of power" from the 5th Floor or the Management Bureau, it will likely be limited to rule-making as opposed to experience-judging.

USAID must create an explicit mandate for the building of knowledge within each mission. With 2- to 3-year tours for most personnel and little overlap or emphasis on what has gone on over the past 20 to 30 years, the institutional memory within missions lies primarily with Foreign Service Nationals or in USAID/W offices with responsibility for tracking change over time. Although these latter two sources of information can generate a certain amount of lessons learned, the lack of incentives for in-mission personnel creates a sort of memory "black hole" that others can work around but never bridge.

There are a variety of fairly simple methods to generate this crucial data flow, e.g., entry and exit interviews, after-action reports for key events, but more important is some agency-wide mandate confirming the utility of such data collection. Every investment in the future is a drain on today's resources, but without them no payoffs accrue. A strong, field-based institutional memory within USAID is a key component to generating best practices over time.

Issue 6

Balancing Between Tactical and Operational Flexibility: The Example of Performance-Based Contracting

OBSERVATION

There is a natural tension between the desire to test causality linking individual results within the Results Framework, i.e., operational-level thinking or issues, and the need to maintain a certain amount of implementing flexibility within individual Results Packages, i.e., tactical-level thinking or issues. On the one hand, if your RP activities are under constant revision, how do you keep track of the hypothesis you thought you were proving between precursor result A and next-order result B? But on the other hand, this is not some abstract experiment where seven successes out of ten proves a strong linkage. You don't have ten chances, and the focus of your one chance is on achieving results. So what do you do? You try your best to balance the requirements for collecting hypothesis-proving or -disproving data with getting the job done on time and under budget if possible.

Now that sounds nice on paper, all neatly packaged in one smooth paragraph, but what about a particularly tough real-world example like performance-based contracting? Here is a tricky splitting of responsibility between those who must choose the result to be achieved, i.e., the RP Team thinking on the operational level, and those on the hook for achieving it, i.e., the contractor thinking on the tactical level, and no matter how much flexibility you afford the contractor, there is still room for a clash of interests to develop.

Performance-based contracting requires extending a good deal of operational freedom of action to a contractor in terms of methods, but what happens when that freedom of action opens up doors not anticipated in the results delineated in the contract, and locked in? A clash of interests between contractor and the RP Team may well result. In short, the question is what happens when performance-based contracting severs the bond between operational goals, i.e., the RP Team working to achieve the next higher-order result, and tactical goals (that one contractor trying to achieve one result within the Results Package?)

Impossible, you say? Try this one on for size: An RP Team contracts with a partnering contractor to have a bridge built across a river. The PBC agreement locks the contractor into the result of the bridge, but allows it great freedom of action in its implementation. The contractor takes that freedom, tests a few ideas along the way, and discovers a bridge is not the way to go. Instead, a far more reliable, flexible, and cheaper alternative is a ferry service. It's simple. It even generates a

A word on military terminology here. In the military hierarchy of goals or results, strategic refers to issues that can have significant or determining effect on the course and outcome of a war. Operational refers to issues that can have significant effect on the outcome of major battles or the general course of any campaign, i.e., series of major battles. Tactical refers to issues that can affect the outcome of engagements or minor battles.

An analogy to the Results Framework would be as follows: strategic issues are those that can affect the overall course or outcome of the RF. Operational issues are those that can affect the outcome of any one intermediate result or the general course of any results track, i.e., series of intermediate results. Tactical issues are those that can affect the achievement of individual tasks within results.

This section examines the tension between the operational and tactical levels, e.g., the Results Package Team and Contractors, using the example of performance-based contracting. The next section examines the tension between the strategic and operational levels, e.g., the Strategic Objective and Results Package Teams, using the example of constructing and/or altering RFs.

RECOMMENDATION

USAID should create performance-based contracts in which contractors have the incentive, not toward achievement of a point in the process, but to help the process along. In the bridge example, it means getting to the other side of the river; in the weapons platform example, it means staying up with technological improvements. In other words, avoid over-specifying results and instead lock the contractor into the goal of getting you and your overall Results Package up and over into the next-order intermediate result, whatever that may be. Make the contractor part owner of, as well as parts provider to, the next-order intermediate result.

Secondly, always try to build into contracts the requirement for upgrading capacity, not simply in the sense of applied technology, but also in terms of straightforward problem-solving. In the bridge example, it means building a contract that encourages either upgrading, e.g., a drawbridge, or downgrading (the ferry service) options. You don't want either your results tracks or your overall Results Framework to suffer the sin of narrow, linear logic, i.e., is the only path possible, so why subject your contractors to the same? Contractors can be a huge source of adaptive planning ideas, but only if performance-based contracting allows them to be. Bottom line: Never have a cutoff date for good ideas.

Issue 7

Balancing Between Operational and Strategic Flexibility: The Process of Creating or Altering a Results Framework

OBSERVATION

Whereas performance-based contracting provides a good example for analyzing the intersection of tactical and operational perspectives, the process of creating or altering a Results Framework illuminates the collision of operational and strategic viewpoints. The RF can be thought of as a relatively soft and flexible latticework of hypotheses, within which is embedded a certain number of real-world "hard reality" results that act as concrete anchor points for the RF's structure.

If the RF is designed flexibly enough, the loss of any one result probably doesn't bring the whole structure crashing down. If not, the first time one of these hard realities breaks apart, the RF is likely to start coming apart at the seams; like some brick house where a couple of bricks crumble and all of a sudden you're looking at a big crack running down through the foundation.

So how do you avoid creating RFs that are both stiff and fragile? How do you avoid the worst outcome of an RF construction: simultaneously putting "all your eggs" into a series of RP "baskets," the demise of any one of which calls the entire RF's viability into question? How do you build into your RF construction a "get around" function, like an electric company's ability to reroute power around failed nodes during a power outage?

ANALOGOUS DISCUSSION

The military is constantly in the business of projecting long-term futures. Its personnel are paid to think about bad things looming over the horizon, because no one in this country likes the idea of someday facing some military threat for which we are totally unprepared. So, like an insurance company, the military spends a lot of planning time thinking ahead to all sorts of things that could go wrong (or, occasionally, right) in ways that could alter our nation's national security requirements.

But because no one in this country likes the idea that we're unnecessarily wasting a lot of money preparing for all sorts of conflicts that will never occur, the military must relate all this strategic futures forecasting to real-world operations and/or tactics that employ the assets they actually have (or will have) on hand; hence, the analogy to the Results Framework.

First, think of all the weapon systems and weapon platforms as so many "hard reality" results lodged within an array of intermediate results known collectively as research and development/acquisitions. Then think of some grand projection of the "future threat" that extends, time-wise, to the year 2020 as the Results Framework. The idea here would then be that you want to have these results tracks of R&D and acquisitions of weapon systems and platforms all come together in time to meet the generic or aggregate threat projected for the endpoint in question (here, a quarter-century down the road.)

Simply put, the Strategic Objective is meeting that over-the-horizon threat with some time and capacity to spare.

Can you imagine everything that could go wrong with this picture? Technologies that end up working or not working out. Cost over-runs. New technologies constantly tempting you with alterations in the plan. The world doesn't turn out exactly as you planned. The list is almost endless. Therefore, laying your entire acquisition strategy down on top of a single template full of educated guesses might work, say,

that is logically going to have to be reconfigured every year (not something bureaucracies are good at encouraging or rewarding employees for,) encourage missions to think across (and present) a range of RF "paths" or structures.

This approach will make it easier for missions both to spot and to own up to planning "mistakes" made by eliminating the requirement for strictly linear logic, i.e., you plan in the potential for orthogonal developments. This would help USAID become a better learning organization by reducing employees' perception of risk exposure and orienting their thinking more to learning as they go.

This should not be thought of as necessarily a prescription for more planning and thus paperwork. The process of deciding on any one RF construction naturally entails consideration of a variety of paths. This idea is simply about not discarding all those alternatives and keeping a few in your kit bag as you head down the road of RF implementation.

FYI: Subscribers might also want to look at an earlier piece in *OnTrack*, on the need for alternative RFs: "A View to Development," Mike McGahuey, Nov. 1995.

Issue 8

Discerning and Identifying Failure in the New OPS System: One Rather Painless Approach to Testing Results Frameworks

OBSERVATION

USAID currently employs no mechanism for testing Results Frameworks created by missions in the field, other than the review of planning methodology and documentation by superior bureaucratic layers. The absence of any such testing mechanism results in significant losses of both training opportunities for mission personnel and pre- and in-implementation troubleshooting for supervising entities

USAID missions are already neck-deep in planning and implementation duties, and the process of constructing Results Frameworks has, in general, proven to be quite long and involved – though also beneficial in building core values such as partnership and empowerment. In such a consistently busy environment with regular personnel turnover, how can USAID create safe conditions ("off-line" or "downtime") within which mission personnel can either practice or test typical decision dynamics? How can USAID missions simulate RF implementation as both a training objective and adaptive planning tool, i.e., simulating downstream RF phases?

More importantly, how might missions simulate RF implementation as a method of exposing structural weakness or poor hypothesis formulation, either prior to implementation (perhaps even as part of the RF construction process) or at periodic points over the RF's lifetime? Much like architects build small-scale or computer-based models to test their designs or design concepts, missions could attempt a form of RF modeling as a test for structural soundness.

ANALOGOUS DISCUSSION

Clearly the military possesses a great advantage over USAID on the issue of training; namely, the military is called upon to perform its basic duty on an intermittent basis. Armed with significant downtime between such activities, the military can afford a tremendous operational focus on training.

Still, the military suffers many of the same personnel-rotation and location-specific training challenges as USAID. Likewise, it is constantly introducing new policies, procedures, and tactics that can benefit greatly from off-line testing, i.e., not in conditions of actual combat. Finally, like USAID, the military understands that its best and more senior field-based decision-makers, i.e., commanders, are not simply created out of thin air, but are shaped slowly over time through experience and training.

At first blush, this piece may seem to be the least useful for AID, as it discusses the relevance of gaming as an analytic tool in evaluating RFs over time. However, it does address an interesting problem which frankly OPS and the ADS have not been able to help with; how to provide ways to think of how an SO might evolve over time, how to reflect risks and opportunities in what might occur, and how to at least speculate what might need to happen if things change. Right now, our planning processes tend to be highly linear, and somewhat static, sort of like an input output table which assumes variables stay static over the life of the SO.

We tried in OPS to think through some of this with the KARLANDA example, but that missed much of the RF/RP details now in the ADS, was not a "real" SO, and hence was seen as being "mythical." The approach outlined here, at least in a simpler form, might indeed allow AID and partners to think through vulnerabilities and risks.

The idea underlying such a training experience would be the simulation of an RF's lifetime, i.e., confronting mission personnel with the artificial experience of living through the entirety of an RF and having to use adaptive planning techniques, year in and year out, to practice dealing with all the surprises fate typically has in store for them over a 5- to 8-year implementation period.

Each seminar session, then, essentially consists of role players being thrust a year or so into the future and having to deal with all the good and bad things that transpired since their last RF "move." The trick for the game controllers is to inject just enough troubling scenarios to force the role players into considering a plausible range of downstream consequences of their RF game play, while not rendering that game play so difficult as to strain the players' credulity (known in game parlance as "losing game transparency.")

Some sectors of private business around the world are looking to the military's gaming techniques as a relatively inexpensive and safe way to test new ideas, policies, and strategies. USAID could well find such techniques to be a good fit with field missions looking to test their RF structures and provide more dynamic training opportunities for their personnel and in-country partners.

Issue 9

The Role of Partners in the New OPS System: Empowerment Without Enough Training Creates a Showstopping Problem

OBSERVATION

USAID's new OPS system clearly empowers development partners throughout the planning and achieving phases. Once the mission makes a grant to an NGO or other entity, its capacity for day-to-day oversight over that agency's implementation is small. This is even true to an extent with contracts, given the new performance-based contracting system that focuses on results and empowers the executors to follow whatever gets those results.

Naturally, the PBC system places a premium on USAID's up-front training of partner and agent organizations and personnel in the ways of the new OPS system. If partners are not sufficiently trained and don't understand the critical nuances of the new adaptive planning philosophy (versus the old, now discredited, supply-led planning logic,) the new OPS system is likely to suffer great dysfunctionality in implementation. In short, a deficiency in training partners is likely to degenerate into a "showstopping" problem for the entire new OPS system.

There are widespread complaints from regular USAID contractors and PVOs that they are undertrained in the new OPS system and do not understand its workings well enough to engage in PBC realistically. Moreover, we have heard via RFNET that PVO and contractor personnel in the field perceive, with great concern, that their current long-range planning efforts are largely divorced from those of local mission SO Teams, primarily because their field staff are significantly "out of the loop" on mission planning as presently implemented under the new OPS system.

To the extent that such complaints and warnings are both accurate and representative of larger realities, and reflect concerns of other partners, such as government agencies and other donors, USAID missions' current implementation of the new OPS system risks negative outcomes and soured partner and agent relationships in the coming months and years.

ANALOGOUS DISCUSSION

The U.S. Navy consists of ships, highly discrete units with a captain in complete charge. As an institution, therefore, the U.S. Navy tends to prefer self-sufficiency. U.S. naval forces would prefer to have both the resources and the authority necessary to handle overseas interventions without relying on support from others over which it has no control.

Having to account in advance for the potential contributions of others is always a tricky matter when it comes to crisis-response planning. In the main this is true because the actual crisis unfolds in ways that render many of those assumed contributions less (or conversely, more) than anticipated (we just tend to remember the "less" cases more.)

Then there are those who show up unexpectedly, some with sufficient resources and others without. In short, the U.S. Navy often encounters the following operational challenge when responding to a regional crisis: you can just never be sure who's coming to the coalition until you arrive on scene and see what you've been given to work with.

Faced with that sort of messy potential, especially one that unfolds at a moment's notice following

the eruption of some regional crisis, the U.S. Navy takes great pains during its peacetime interactions with partner navies around the world to pursue as much joint training as possible. This training takes a lot of effort and substantial resources, but it is a must for the Navy because, in this era, the U.S. public mandates its armed forces seek, wherever possible, to avoid having to "go it alone," and that means a policy of accepting "all comers" in most overseas operations.

To its credit, the Navy has developed and pursued a reasonable and farsighted policy regarding joint training with partner navies around the globe. In short, the U.S. Navy sees itself as the "hub" of any international naval coalition, with that large number of potential partner navies as interchangeable "spokes" ready for rapid insertion and coordinated operations.

Much like the idea of "open architecture" in current ship design, i.e., creating more generic ship hull "shells" that feature component "suites" that allow for an easy "plug in and play" capability for high-tech equipment, the hubs-spokes vision revolves around optimizing both the U.S. and partner navies along the logic of "plug in and play" capabilities. In other words, the focus of the joint training is on "interoperability," or the capacity for individual navies' assets to come together in communications and operations as seamlessly as possible again, with the U.S. Navy's unparalleled assets playing the "hub" role to the allied "spokes."

For the U.S. Navy to leverage the contributions of allied navies for maximum effect in any one operation, peacetime joint training must serve as the "wickets" through which any potential partner navy must pass and thereby prove its capabilities. Simply put, proof of partnering skills comes up front or there is no partnering.

As part of this "hub-spokes" vision, the U.S. Navy publishes generic procedural guidelines for potential partners and regular training partners. These publications spell out in great detail what skills and assets are required to perform joint operations with the U.S. Navy across its entire operational spectrum.

The U.S. Navy's never-ceasing efforts to nurture joint operational ties with foreign navies reflects its realistic attitude about the training challenge created by its "hub-and-spokes" vision of coalition operations if you want to be the "hub," you either "put up" in terms of training partners or "shut up" about playing leader.

RECOMMENDATION

USAID cannot skimp on its responsibility to train partner and agent organizations. At a minimum, the resources and effort devoted to training partner organizations must match the new OPS system's rhetoric concerning empowerment. As any management guru will tell you, training is always the first thing to feel the axe of budget-cutters, even though it routinely provides the greatest return on the dollar spent.

Much like skimping on preventive maintenance with a new car, USAID might find that its new OPS system can get by with minimal training of partners in the short term. But if the new OPS system was designed and is being implemented "for the long haul," anything less than an aggressive and pervasive focus on training will be the single, most self-destructive "bureaucratic path of least resistance" that USAID can choose in the coming months and years.

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